19. The Republic of Uzbekistan noted that the accession of India to the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation as an observer is an important factor in raising the importance of the Organisation and expansion in its abilities to impact positively on regional and global processes.

20. Both Sides shares the opinion that the intensification of co-operation within the framework of SCO in countering contemporary challenges would promote the development of effective mechanisms in strengthening regional security.

21. The two Sides noted with satisfaction that the discussions and meetings held in Tashkent have made an important contribution to the steady development of mutually beneficial — India-Uzbekistan co-operation, which would serve the causes of further strengthening traditionally friendly relations and multi-faceted co-operation between the two countries.

22. The Prime Minister of the Republic of India H.E. Dr. Manmohan Singh invited the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, H.E. Mr. Islam Karimov to pay an official visit to the Republic of India. The invitation was accepted with pleasure. The dates of the visit would be decided through diplomatic channels.

Tashkent
26 April, 2006.

Relaxation in the visa policy

3529 KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state.

(a) whether inspite of the continuing peace process between India and Pakistan there is no relaxation in the visa policy, which is the main road block in people to people contacts;

(b) whether the Ministry is planning to give relaxation unilaterally to the senior citizens, who are keen to visit their birth place; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Government firmly believes that

people to people contact is a significant factor in generating goodwill;and promoting bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, and it has consistently endeavoured to negotiate a visa regime that encourages such contacts. In keeping with this policy, Government announced unilateral visa liberalizations in September 2004, which included, *inter alia,* multiple entry visas for accredited journalists, exemption from reporting to the police for various categories of Pakistani nationals such as those above 65 years of age, academicians, and doctors. In December 2004, Government announced additional visa liberalization measures such as visa on arrival at Wagah for certain categories of people and grant of student visas for allowing admission in Indian institutions to Pakistani students on a case-by-case basis.

India presented a draft proposing amendments to the present India-Pakistan Visa Agreement during the visit of former Extenal Affairs Minister to Pakistan from 2-5 October 2005. The draft envisages longer duration visit visas for people from both countries and proposes the addition of new categories of visas such as student, pilgrims and business visa to facilitate easier movement of people across the border. Pakistan has not given its response to this draft visa agreement. Talks on visa matters are continuing in the third round of the India-Pakistan Composite Dialogue.

(b) and (c) With regard to senior citizens, on 18 September 2004, Government had announced unilaterally the grant of visas with exemption from reporting to the Police to all Pakistani nationals above the age of 65. Government unilaterally announced visa on arrival to be available at Wagah for Pakistani nationals above the age of 65 during the Forein Secretary level talks held on 27 December 2004. Pakistan, however, does not allow its citizens to come to the Wagah check-post without a visa for India.

Delhi-Kathmandu bus service

3530. SHRI BALAVANT *ALIAS* BAL APTE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any poposal under the consideration of Government to start a bus service between Delhi and Kathmandu on the pattern of Srinagar-Muzaffarbad bus service;